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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

National standardization of geographical names in Japan

Paper submitted by Japan**

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** Prepared by the Government of Japan.

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It is said that there are more than 10 million geographical names in Japan that are commonly used in daily life. It is a valuable endeavour to collect, register and standardize these names since they help not only to preserve the country's cultural heritage but also to promote economic and social activities.

There is no single central agency responsible for collecting, registering and standardizing geographical names in Japan. Several agencies and organizations have been sharing the responsibility in their respective specialized fields and have cooperated in achieving consistent standardization.

The agencies engaged in map preparation, namely the Geographical Survey Institute and the Hydrographic Department of the Maritime Safety Agency, collect and treat geographical names of geographical entities in land and ocean areas respectively. Both agencies adopt the names to be used on their maps and charts by referring to the local governments concerned, on the principle that the name used in common among the people of the concerned local areas should be adopted.

Names of administrative divisions and settlements are stipulated in appropriate laws and regulations, and new names and their application to appropriate areas are announced in the official gazettes. These names are therefore treated as standardized. The spelling and pronunciation of natural feature names and other conventional place-names, however, have not always been fixed even among the people of the concerned local areas. They change with time. Sometimes one natural feature has two or more names.

In order to cope with this kind of problem and to standardize the names to be used by the two agencies, the Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names was established in 1960 with the aim of unifying the geographical names to be used on maps and charts prepared by the Geographical Survey Institute and the Hydrographic Department. The Joint Committee sits once or twice a year. Representatives from the elementary and secondary education bureaux, the Ministry of Education and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) are invited to take part in the Joint Committee as observers. The names adopted by the Joint Committee are to be used in education and broadcasting.

Decisions on geographical names are based on the following principles:

(a) Names commonly used by both agencies are adopted as the standard names. If there is a conflict, the standard name is decided after conferring with local governments and other agencies;

(b) The names of international waters admitted by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) are adopted as a rule;

(c) "Hiragana (or Hirakana)" characters should be used to indicate the pronunciation of names;

(d) Characters to be used for writing the geographical names should be: "Kanji" (Chinese character); "Hiragana"; "Katakana"; and a long vowel symbol (-) in case of "Katakana".

(Example)	Spelling of name	Pronunciation
	日ノ峰山	ひのみねさん

(Hinomine San)

As of 1978, the Joint Committee has completed standardizing 6,000 natural feature names on maps at 1:500,000 scale.

Since the Fifth Conference, the Joint Committee has been reviewing already adopted standardized geographical names.